

Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2012

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Tisiphone abeona abeona (?) at Wombat Dam Feb 10
Photo - George Broadway

PRESIDENTS REPORT FOR 2011

Again the club was treated to a varied range of speakers and topics which demonstrated their particular area of expertise or environmental concern. The fact that they were willing to travel to Castlemaine reinforced this ideal.

Our first speaker for 2011, Laurie Levy expressed his concern at the inequality of the human/bird relationship, with some of our endangered wildlife at a sad disadvantage.

Professor Julian Hollis, now a local resident, illustrated a wonderful knowledge of our local geology, his excursion the next morning truly directed at the fit – even over a short distance in our hilly terrain around the town.

Debbie Worland spoke to and later in April launched her DVD, five years in the making; "The Swift Parrots of Muckleford" More than 80 people attended this launch by Chris Tzaros from Birds Australia at the Castlemaine Market Building.

Dr Richard Retallick presented an illustrated talk on the decline and recovery of frogs. Natasha Schedvin spoke on Barking Owls, detailing some areas of the State with declining numbers due to human intervention like fuel reduction burns and forest clearing. Euan Moore showed some stunning photos of bird life in Sri Lanka. And the year progressed with equally interesting speakers like Craig Grabham, Paul Horne, Mike Weston, and Geoff Carr.

Again your Committee put in the hard hours organising the behind the scenes activities which ensure the club runs smoothly and efficiently. A sub-committee has organised the 2012 speakers, so come along and support and applaud the presenters.

Committee members are hard to find, so if YOU feel you can contribute, please speak to the Secretary or President. Leaders with other members help are also needed for activities such as spring wildflower walks etc.

Finally I would like to thank all those who have helped me as President over the last two terms.

- Denis Hurley

Wombat Dam, 10/2/12

Rita Mills

After such a storm on the night of the general meeting, Saturday proved to be a very pleasant day and I thought we would have a good roll-up for the Field Trip. It was carefully planned for a hot day, so that we would be back home by the heat of the day, after a visit to a much cooler area than Castlemaine! Only, of course, it was *my* sort of day – cool with great billowing cumulous cloud!

Only four people were ready to leave the Octopus at 9 o'clock and I think we all enjoyed ourselves. We didn't see many birds, nor many flowers (did we see any?) but we did find lots of regrowth coming along well after the stress of drought and fire. We found numerous seedlings of *Pultenaea daphnoides*, and quite a few plants of *Bossiaea*, probably *B. buxifolia*, which is fairly common in the Daylesford area. Of course there were masses of young eucalypts, including some with the very large leaves such as were brought to the meeting back in, I think, December for identification. It was on one of these saplings that I found some very strange galls which I have never seen before. They were greenish, and almost like small sultanas to look at, and pretty much the same texture. I opened one and found a bright orange/red grub inside. After several days forgotten in my backpack, they were still soft, though the leaf was drying out, but I didn't manage to identify them.

While we walked along the edge of the water we were watching fine misty rain streaming down towards the dam wall, but we had very little among the trees.

Our bird list wasn't large, in fact only 10 species with a possible 11th, as Noel thought he spotted a Nankeen Night Heron fly off just as we arrived. The birds were Grey Fantail, Superb Blue Fairy-wrens, Scarlet Robin, White-throated Tree-creeper, White-faced Heron (which didn't seem much fussed by us at all), Crimson Rosellas, mainly juveniles now in independent small flocks, Magpie, and Yellow Robin and Kookaburra heard.



Misty rain over Wombat dam



Our Sec. and Pres. have a tea break

Weed Watch

Geraldine Harris

During the year I want to look at some invasive exotic plants that are escaping into the surrounding countryside and competing with our native indigenous species. I will look at how these infestations can be controlled and what native plants can be used in their place.

Note: Our native plants cannot be expected to perform as reliably as pest plants that have selectively bred for survival over hundreds of years. However, getting rid of pest plants and replacing them with native species will help preserve the integrity of our local habitats and attract and provide for more native birds and animals.

Gazania Linearis

Gazanias are the large daisy-type yellow flowers that like most environmental weeds, are escaping from private gardens and appearing more and more abundantly along our roadsides and in our bushland. These plants are appearing more and more along roadsides throughout Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales.



These very showy plants originated in South Africa and are being promoted in many of our local plant nurseries as a tough drought resistant species. Many hybrids have been developed in cultivation between *Gazania linearis* and closely related environmental weed species *Gazania rigens*. These plants produce abundant wind-blown seeds that can be dispersed many kilometres from the source, producing ever-increasing patches of gazania that compete with locally indigenous species. They are also spread into our bushland by the dumping of garden waste containing the tuberous root systems of these plants.

Control methods include pulling out by hand if the infestation is small or spraying with glyphosate (Roundup or Zero) into the heart of the rosette. If you have a large outbreak amongst grasses or in a lawn, a broadleaf-selective herbicide is a much better option. At very least remove and bag the flower heads as most of these species have the ability to mature detached flower heads into masses of viable seed.

As substitutes you could plant Sticky Everlasting *Xerochrysum viscosum*, Common Everlasting *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* and Clustered Everlasting *Chrysocephalum semipapposum*. Pigface *Carpobrotus modestus* would require no water and produce large pink-mauve flowers all summer.

Ref:

Rayner C. 2012, 'Weed of the Month', *Angair Newsletter*. No 1, p6.

Marriot N.2011, 'Plant 'Aussies' – not weeds', *Growing Australian*, Vol 54.3, No 216, p12-13.

2012 Connecting Country Education Program

The Education Program explores the idea that efficient production and care for nature go hand in hand. It includes workshops, lectures, discussions and field trips, and will throw some interesting questions at participants: Can farmers get paid to look after nature? How can conservation measures help long term farm efficiency? Does revegetation really make farmland more resilient?

Commencing on Monday the 27th of February, the program will first travel to Maldon, Chewton, Sutton Grange and Guildford to present a nest box watch workshop series. This will be followed by a lecture on the benefits of biodiversity in agriculture with Dr Dennis Saunders (Research Fellow CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences) on Tuesday 20th of March. Other sessions will cover practicalities like identifying native vegetation using Victorian Standards with Paul Foreman (Bush Heritage Australia) and Ian Higgins (North Central Catchment Management Authority) on Saturday 25th of March, followed by Establishing goals for revegetation initiatives by Prof Ary Hoffman (Bio21 Institute – University of Melbourne) on Tuesday 8th of May, and finish with “Using native grasses and shrubs for pasture”, presented by Graeme Hand (STIPA Native Grasses Association) on Friday 25th of May. A panel discussion on the economic opportunities related to farming for nature will also be held on Wednesday 18th April where the public can quiz some of the active local organisations such as Australian Carbon Traders, Trust for Nature, Connecting Country, Bush Broker and Land for Wildlife.

The program is open to all members of the public. Evening sessions are free, however the first two field days are \$10 per person to cover transportation. For more information and to RSVP please contact bryan@connectingcountry.org.au or call the Connecting Country office on 5472 1594. Full details of the program and a registration form can be found on the CC website.

Field Days

What are Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) and how are they applied in natural resource management?

Sunday 25th of March. 9:00am to 1:00pm. *Limited seats – bookings essential.* \$10 per person Meet at the Ray Bradfield Room, Castlemaine (Behind Castlemaine Information Centre - 44 Mostyn Street)

Paul Foreman (Blue Devil Consulting & Bush Heritage Australia), **Ian Higgins** (North Central Catchment Management Authority) with assistance from ecologists **Chris Timewell** and **Bonnie Humphreys** (Connecting Country).

A skills-based training exercise, the session will unpack the notion of vegetation classification as used in Victorian resource management systems. Participants will learn about the process of identifying an EVC in a natural setting and have the opportunity to discuss the application of EVCs in revegetation. The session will include a discussion on plant life-form and structure, basic plant identification, soils and landform and other factors such as forest floor litter and climate.

Farming and biodiversity conservation - how it can work in practice?

Sunday 22nd of April. 9:00am to 1:00pm. *Limited seats – bookings essential.* \$10 per person. Meet at the **Ray Bradfield Room** (Behind Castlemaine Information Centre - 44 Mostyn Street). **Geoff Park** (North Central Catchment Management Authority), **Malcolm Fyffe** (Local landholder).

Landscape planning and biodiversity on farms are concepts that have been with us for a number of years. This field day showcases these concepts through an excursion to a local landholder's property. We will explore biodiversity from a farmer's perspective and a conservationist's perspective. Discussion will occur at on-farm sites and will include locations where land management practices have been adapted to incorporate biodiversity and indeed locations where intensive production activity still occurs. Come and hear both sides of the story and enjoy a day in the field.

Native grasses and forage shrubs in farming systems .

Friday 25th of May. 12 – 4pm. Lunch provided. *Free event.* Yandoit Community Hall, High Street, Yandoit. **Graeme Hand** (STIPA Native Grasses Association), **Paul Righetti** (local landholder).

Explore the benefits of native grasses and forage shrubs in farming systems. Commencing at the Yandoit Hall, the field day will progress to a local property that will provide a backdrop for discussion around topics such as; the production potential of native pastures, plant species selection for native pastures and establishing or regenerating grass communities for native pastures. Graeme Hand will emphasize the benefits of native pastures such as reducing wind erosion and increasing soil carbon, drought tolerant pastures and promoting biodiversity.

Free evening talks (Supper provided)

Workshop – Nest box monitoring training.

February 29 to March 15. 6:00pm to 8:00pm. Chewton (Wed 29 Feb), Maldon (Wed 7 Mar), Sutton Grange (Wed 14 Mar) and Guildford (Thu 15 Mar).

Limited numbers – bookings essential. **Bryan McMullan** (Connecting Country).

Join Connecting Country in our annual nest box monitoring. Learn how to accurately identify the occupants of nest boxes, to fill in data sheets and to report your observations in a meaningful way. On the night, there is a good chance we will see a Sugar Glider and/or a Phascogale (Tuan). Experiences will include field based sampling, arboreal animal identification, basic vegetation identification, completing data sheets and data analysis. Participants will perform a nest box survey under the supervision of a trained technician, discuss the pros and cons of the procedure, learn about data interpretation and build new opportunities for future surveys.

Biodiversity and agriculture.

Tuesday 20th of March. 6:30pm to 9pm. Newstead Community Centre - 9 Lyons Street, Newstead

Dr Denis Saunders (Research Fellow CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences and Member Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists)

Renowned in the field of environmental management, Dr Denis Saunders will talk about biodiversity and why it is important. He will discuss the concepts of ecosystem goods and services and elaborate on certain aspects such as the life support capacity of a functioning landscape, and the precautionary principle that should guide us in maintaining intergenerational equity in our environment. Dr Saunders will finish his presentation by discussing recent changes in biodiversity, the consequences related to these changes and propose a way forward that incorporates biodiversity into management systems.

Panel Discussion – Can I get paid to farm nature?

Wednesday 18th of April. 6:30pm to 9pm. Campbells Creek Community Centre – Lot 47B (Sth end) Elizabeth St, Campbells Ck.

Tim Read (Trust for Nature), **Peter Johnson** (Land for Wildlife), **Nick Lewis** (ES Link Services), **Ben Keogh** (Australian Carbon Traders), **Chris Timewell** (Connecting Country).

Join five professionals in a panel discussion highlighting the opportunities available to landholders in a growing sector of opportunity. You will learn about the services and incentives available to assist you in protecting and enhancing biodiversity on your land. Panelists will focus their discussion on points related to local landholders.

Revegetation into the future.

Tuesday 8th of May. 6:30pm – 9pm. Sutton Grange Community Hall – 1383 Bendigo – Sutton Grange Rd **Professor Ary Hoffmann** (Bio21 Institute – University of Melbourne)

In the face of environmental degradation, Professor Ary Hoffman will discuss the concept of evolutionary resilience and how it can be included in conservation and landscape planning strategies. Join Connecting Country for a night of discussion where the effects of climate change on flora and fauna will be considered. Professor Hoffman will outline ways in which land restoration and revegetation can promote evolutionary processes. He will describe ways that can improve the chances of flora and fauna to adapt and survive severe changes in environmental conditions.

The club often receives requests for donations. Committee's policy is to bring them to the notice of members for individual response.

The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria:

1. Environmental Fund directed to worthwhile projects on the environment.
More information at www.fncv.org.au
2. FNCV Australian Natural History Medallion Trust Fund.

Forward donations to the Treasurer, FNCV Locked Bag 3. P.O. Blackburn, Vic. 3130

Membership and Subscriptions for 2012

At the AGM the treasurer proposed that as the balance of costs and membership has begun to erode the clubs funds, and the fees have not changed for several years, a small increase in the annual fees is recommended. This proposal was adopted by a show of hands, and the new fees are as follows:

Ordinary membership – single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student – single \$25, Family \$30

**Subscriptions are now due – please forward with the membership form to
The Treasurer, CFNC, P.O. Box 324 Castlemaine 3450**

Observations

- ◆ The juvenile Nankeen Night Heron again seen in the Botanical Gardens; and more recently, a Boobook Owl also discovered roosting in the Gardens – George Broadway
- ◆ 1: Birds gradually disappearing from Bells Swamp, and the Lignum is in flower; 2: Six young Sugar Gliders in a nest box ~ 100m from a friend's farmhouse – Rita Mills
- ◆ A young Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan) found busy on a Grey Box near the shed (Merrifield St); a Lesser Long-eared Bat (?) *Nyctophilus geoffroyi* roosting in the woodshed; a male Scarlet Robin near the house – Denis Hurley
- ◆ Recently I needed to rescue an Australian Owlet Nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus* from a combustion stove chimney (150 mm diam). Took a couple of pictures, rinsed some soot from its head, and it took off, hopefully unharmed! - Denis Hurley

Sad conclusion to the story of Denis's Quail

Following the narrative by Denis [p 7 Feb newsletter] at the last general meeting we heard that they may have been taken by a mob of Choughs which invaded the property with apparent intent to search out the perpetrator of the dinner plate clearings on the ground. Moreover, having compared a closer photo with the illustration in Chris Tzaros' book (Wildlife of the Box Ironbark Country), Denis now thinks they were Painted Button-quail *Turnix varia* [Ed]

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

March 2012

Fri March 9 meeting: speaker MILES GELDARD

subject nest boxes

Sat March 10 field trip: Moolort wetlands

Fri April 13 meeting: speaker CAROL HALL

subject 'A Touch of Ice - Spitsbergen & Greenland 2010.'

Sat April 14 field trip: a small bush reserve

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Denis Hurley's; 20 Merrifield St., at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2012

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2012 Committee

Rita Mills (President) 5472 4553

George Broadway (Secretary) georgebroadway@bigpond.com 5472 2513

Nigel Harland (Treasurer) 5474 8246 Chris Morris 0418 996 289

Chris Timewell 5472 1553 Noel Young (Editor) 5472 1345

[email newsletter material to: noel.young@optusnet.com.au]

**Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.
Inc #A0003010B**